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ASLEF

JANUARY 2007

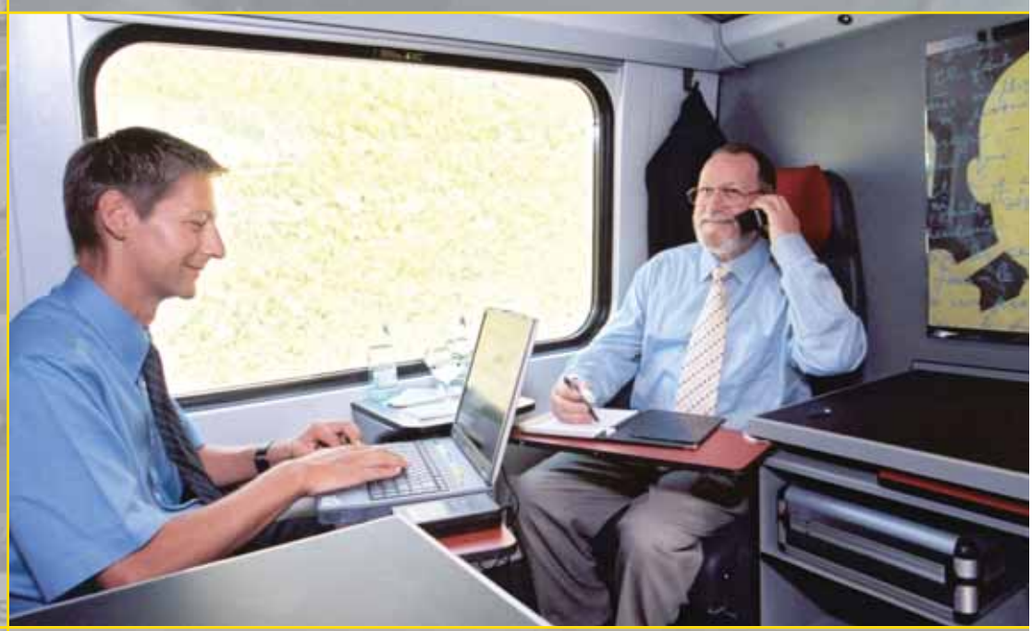
Journal

2007

Road congestion costs business £20bn a year

Air travel is the most polluting mode of transport

The Government has the facts - now is the time to act



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the ASLEF Journal
January 2007

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2007 – the year of the train?

LOGICALLY 2007 should see a massive expansion of rail travel, enthusiastically backed by the UK government. The reasons are self-evident. Global warming is an issue of major concern: rail can cut carbon emissions. Road congestion is gradually bringing the country – and the economy – to a stand-still: rail is the logical alternative to road transport. Huge lorries are bad for the environment and the state of our roads, as well as being dangerous for motorists and cyclists: rail is the obvious choice to move long-haul freight.

The logic is on our side: but sadly the government does nothing. Oh, it looks and sounds concerned – but the Department for Transport, by continuing the Tory policy of rail privatisation, has made itself impotent. It has given away its power. It cannot direct – it can only try to bribe profit motivated rail companies into compliance. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

One instance where it doesn't is Wales. First Great Western (FGW) bid for work including Welsh routes and the government accepted its offer. Then FGW calculated that the Cardiff to Swansea section cost them £1.2 million a year and that it only brought in £112,000 in revenue. So it did what any capitalist company would do: it began to cut the service. The busy 1718 was the first chosen for the chop. The reaction from the public was predictable.

As a result of a public outcry politicians at every level have demanded that the DfT should make funds available to finance the service. Welsh Assembly Members Edwina Hart and John Griffiths complained, local MPs objected and even Cabinet Minister Peter Hain got involved – calling the situation 'simply unacceptable' on the floor of the House of Commons. To complicate matters further, Arriva Trains Wales said they would gladly run additional trains – if they were paid to do so. The Department refused to pay up: the result is stalemate. Literally. Nothing moves.

It sums up the privatisation disaster. Bureaucrats argue with private companies; politicians raise the issue with ministers and companies squabble between themselves. Meanwhile the public stand shivering on stations.

If private companies are allowed to run down services the public will be forced onto the roads. They will have no choice. This will leave the government's environment policies in tatters, the public will become disenchanted with rail and the roads will become even more cluttered than they are today.

The alternative is to bring rail back into public ownership so that sensible service decisions can be made in the public interest – rather than on the basis of profit levels. This is not just the best way forward for rail – it is the only way to ensure that 2007 really does become the year of the train.

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Increase services not ticket prices, says GS

KEITH NORMAN said last month that there should be increases in the number of trains - rather than the cost of travelling on them.

He was reacting to the news that season tickets will rise by 4.3% in January and rises of over 12% are predicted for some rail journeys.

'If fare rises continue at this rate, people will be forced to use their cars for economy's sake,' he said. 'We are in danger of building a railway for the rich,' he said.

Keith was reacting to announcements that Virgin Trains will raise the cost of an open return from London to Glasgow by 8%, a standard open return from London to Plymouth on First Great Western will go from £190 to £214 and a journey on Southeastern from London to Canterbury will jump from £19.90 to £22.10. There will be an average 4.7% increase on season tickets, cheap day returns and long distance journeys.

The operating companies and the government claim it is reasonable for passengers to pay for more of the cost of rail. A spokesman for Virgin Trains said, 'If Virgin gets extra carriages then passengers have to pay for them. More capacity to accommodate demand comes at a cost.' The Department for Transport said it 'expects fare-payers to foot a greater share of the bill' for expanding the rail network through longer trains and platforms.

'A decade ago our taxes subsidised the railways. Now we pay extra fares to do the same. The difference is that we used to own the industry and now we don't. Now private firms decide what 'product' to offer us and the government stands impotent on the side-lines. Rail is no longer a service – it is a profit-making industry that charges passengers what it can get away with,' Keith argues.

Some of the increased fares from 2 January according to Passenger Focus include:

- Bristol to Edinburgh £119.80-£125 (Virgin Cross Country)
- London to Glasgow £94.10-£98.20 (Virgin West Coast)
- London to Weymouth £49.50-£53.10 (South West Trains)
- Leeds to Newcastle £42.10-£43.90 (TransPennine Express)
- Birmingham to Edinburgh £88.70-£92.50 (Virgin Cross Country)
- Gillingham to London £18.10-£18.90 (SouthEastern)

FGW cuts leaves Welsh passengers stranded

THE union has condemned cuts by First Great Western (FGW) to services in Wales as 'immoral, mean and discriminatory'. The decision to axe the 17.18 from Cardiff Central – one of the best-used trains from Cardiff to Swansea – has sparked claims that First Group are only interested in London-Cardiff trains, and that it has little interest in the rest of the principality.

The train is used by 300 people west of Cardiff – but after December 11 last year they now have to wait for the 17.38 Arriva Trains Wales (AWT) service from Cardiff – which has just over 100 seats and is already a busy train.

A statement from First Great Western said carrying passengers within Wales was 'not its job'.

The Welsh Assembly meanwhile accuses

Westminster of transferring the funding burden from London to Cardiff on the basis that while FGW's new franchise is funded by central Government, ATW is funded by the Assembly Government. ATW may therefore face pressure to provide extra seats for passengers left high and dry by FGW.

'ASLEF is fed up with these constant lunacies caused by the sale of rail and the break up of the national rail network,' Keith Norman says. 'In Wales there is no doubt that passengers are paying more for a worse service. It is ridiculous that we complain about road traffic levels between Cardiff and Swansea and then create a situation where there is no train between the cities from 17.05 until 17.38 – and that one's full!

'The train companies show no concern for passengers – bar an interest in their purses.'

Freeze on fuel allowance leaves pensioners cold

GORDON Brown's pre-budget statement last month earned few plaudits from charities and pensioners. They accused the Chancellor of leaving the 'old in the cold' – reference to the fact that pensioners have been faced with an average 87% rise in gas prices and a 56% rise in electricity in recent years.

Despite inflation running at 3.6%; inflation for pensioners is more like 9% according to charities which had expected movement on the winter fuel allowance. It remains static at £200 per household, £300 for the over-80s.

The 3.6% increase in the 'basic state pension' will bring it to just £87.30 for a single pensioner in April 2007 - the government defines £114 as the poverty line.

ASLEF's executive committee is encouraging all branches and districts to affiliate to the National Pensioners Convention which campaigns to eradicate pensioner poverty.

Australians to buy back freight network

THE Labour Government of Victoria, Australia, is set to buy back the state's freight rail network. It announced earlier this month that it had signed an in-principle agreement to buy back the lease from Pacific National.

The Alliance of Councils for Rail Freight Development is anxious to see the commitment fulfilled and also calls for the standardisation of lines

Rail link for Glasgow airport approved

A NEW rail link connecting Glasgow city centre with Glasgow Airport has received final approval from the Scottish Parliament.

Work can now begin on the £160 million Glasgow Airport Rail Link (GARL) project, which will allow passengers to reach the airport from the city centre in just 15 minutes. Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) – the organisation behind GARL – wants the first trains on the new route to be operational by 2010.

GLASGOW: Scotland's busiest airport

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JACK JONES was honoured at the Retired Members' Section's Annual General Meeting for his work in the British trade union movement and also for the courageous role he played as a member of the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War.

Keith Norman, ASLEF General Secretary, presented Jack with Honorary Membership of ASLEF to great applause from over 100 retired members present at the meeting.

Our picture shows Jack Jones in the hallway of ASLEF's headquarters, next to the bust of former general secretary Ray Buckton.

Union anger as roadtrains are back on the agenda

ASLEF General Secretary Keith Norman has dismissed a new DfT study into 'roadtrains' as 'unnecessary and irritating'.

'It is less than 12 months since Stephen Ladyman announced the department's decision not to allow these monsters on UK roads,' Keith says. 'Why the issue has to be dragged up again is beyond me.' Keith said it was 'a prime example of un-joined up government'.

'On one hand the government talks about its concerns about excessive road use and its intention to introduce charging – and at the same time it is resurrecting the debate about allowing these dangerous and destructive lorries onto our roads. How on earth can this help the government's stated aim of assisting rail freight?'

Currently the maximum allowed lorry length is 16.5 metres for articulated vehicles and 18.75 metres for drawbar combinations, with a maximum weight of 40 tonnes. The DfT study is considering allowing even larger units, like the B-double which is up to 25.25 metres long and weighs 60 tonnes, and the A-train which is 31 metres long and weighs 84 tonnes.

'The 60 tonners are totally unsuitable for UK roads,' Keith says. 'Their weight destroys road surfaces and their length makes them dangerous to overtake and adds to congestion. The 84 tonners don't even bear thinking about.'

Keith points to a union survey last year which showed 67% of the public opposed to larger lorries. ASLEF's campaign against them was joined by environmental groups who opposed the plans on pollution grounds and other companies – such as BT which is concerned about lorry heights hitting its cabling and bridges.

'We don't need a study about this. We need a government that will stand by the decision it has made,' Keith says. 'Alternatively, I can save them a lot of time and effort. The first thing they are to consider is 'Whether there is a fundamental need for longer and heavier goods vehicles in the UK'.

'The answer's no.'

ASLEF's cab campaign moves to Parliament

THE union's campaign to highlight the poor conditions of many driving cabs today - and to set out what cabs should actually be like - has gone to Parliament. As the union raises SQUASH as a matter of national interest, the executive committee is asking members to contact their MP to urge him or her to sign Parliamentary Early Day Motion 247. The full text of the EDM is below.

'Nearly fifty MPs have already signed up but we need as many as possible if we are going to bring pressure to bear on employers,' said Keith Norman. 'I hope our members will write to MPs on the subject of train cab conditions using the points in the draft letter we have provided as a model.'

He added that the union is currently producing campaign leaflets and stickers to make the campaign even more visible.

EDM 247: **'Increase in Signals Passed At Danger (SPADs) on the railways**
That this House is concerned by the report from the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) which found a dramatic increase in the number of Signals Passed At Danger (SPADs) in July 2006 to 42 incidents, an increase of 62% compared with the same period in 2005, and 20% higher than the previous three-year average, when weather temperatures were much lower; concerned that the extremely high temperatures in July 2006 affected the performance of train drivers, thereby increasing the number of SPADs and compromising the safety of drivers and the general public; calls upon Train Operating Companies to ensure that all train cabs are fitted with sustainable air temperature control devices.'

MODEL LETTER/ MAIN POINTS FOR MP LETTER

'Dear MP,

I am a train driver with (insert company name) and a member of the train drivers' union ASLEF.

I am writing to ask you to support a new ASLEF campaign to protect the health and safety of train drivers and the general public. In particular I am asking you to sign Parliamentary Early Day Motion 247 which calls on train companies to install sustainable air temperature control devices in all train cabs as a matter of urgency.

I believe that safety on the railways is being compromised by a failure to provide modern air temperature controlled cabs. I know from personal experience the affect on concentration and performance that a very hot cab can have when driving a train. My union is concerned that there is a direct link between the increase in Signals Passed At Danger (SPADs) and the extremely hot weather experienced during the month of July 2006.

We are therefore calling on all train operating companies to ensure that all driving cabs are fitted with sustainable air temperature control devices.

I hope that as my Member of Parliament I can count on your support and I urge you to sign the EDM. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely '

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The Eddington Report - not much change for rail

EARLIER this year the government's environment watchdog commissioned a report by Sir Rod Eddington 'to assess the long term links between transport and the UK's economic productivity, growth and stability'. Its findings were published last month and, as it will be treated seriously by the government, we here consider some of its main features.

The Eddington Review shows just how much concerns about transport are changing. When the review was set up in the 2005 Budget, the government was under pressure from the CBI for not building enough roads or recognising the importance of transport to the economy. Now the emphasis is on climate change and the need to cut pollution from transport – a major source of greenhouse gas emissions.

Transport – excluding aviation – accounts for 25% of all UK emissions. The government is under pressure to show support for lowering carbon-based transport.

ROAD TRAFFIC The Review focussed on congestion as a threat to the economy. The CBI

figures congestion costs British business £20bn a year and business has been increasingly vocal in demanding action. Predictably, Eddington's main response is to call for road pricing.

Research shows that road-building does not solve congestion. A 2002 Government study of the M25 said delays for drivers would continue to increase even if it was widened to 14 lanes – because widened roads attract more development alongside them. Studies of the Newbury by-pass show traffic within Newbury has returned to pre-bypass levels. On the other hand, the London congestion charge has cut traffic and congestion whilst raising funding for alternatives. The Treasury is likely to use the Eddington Report to introduce road pricing.

ASLEF may support road pricing if the revenues raised (estimated by the BBC at £28bn a year) are ploughed back into the rail industry – but not if it is used to fund new roads.

UPGRADE THE TRACK The Report comes out against a new high speed rail line but in favour of upgrades to existing rail lines. It stresses Eddington's belief in better links between and within cities – which could mean a review of light rail schemes which the government refused to back last year. However, the approach is clearly not good news for supporters of new projects such as the £16bn London Crossrail scheme.

ASLEF obviously supports improving existing rail lines, expanding the railways and creating more trams. The government says it agrees – but it goes along with increased rail fares and service cuts. We need major increases in rail capacity to offer an alternative to aviation – but feel there should also be consideration of extra track, station rebuilds and a new north-south freight line using disused rail lines.

HOT AIR The report offers support for airports, which seems to conflict with the government's concern over pollution and its insistence that all transport should pay their full carbon costs. However, it should be remembered that Sir Rod Eddington is an Australian businessman – who is best known as CEO of British Airways from 2000 to 2005!

Eddington also seems to complain about transport planning procedures and appears to favour cutting them.

ASLEF opposes any weakening of public involvement in transport projects. We are sure any such move would cause widespread anger and protest.

● *Thanks to Stephen Joseph and Transport 2000 for research material*

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Rail regulator challenges leasing monopoly on rolling stock

IN YET another wrangle resulting from the disaster of rail privatisation, the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) said last month it is likely to call for a detailed investigation by the Competition Commission into the UK's train leasing companies (known as ROSCOs).

At the request of the Department for Transport, in July ORR launched a study of the £1 billion-a-year market.

The DfT said it believed lack of competition was leading to excessive profits for the UK's three main train leasing firms, which are all owned by banks, and higher costs for franchised train operators and taxpayers. Following its internal study, ORR said it could not give the market 'a clean bill of health'. It said it suspects it 'prevents, restricts or distorts' competition because it had found the leasing firms were making excess profits. In many instances, ORR says, train operators have very limited choice in available rolling stock.

Before a formal referral to the Competition Commission it is intended to meet 'key parties' to see if they wish to suggest remedies of their own– but this seems unlikely. Porterbrook, for example, declared that 'present competition in the market is effective and delivers efficient outcomes for the industry and passengers'.

Porterbrook is owned by the Abbey National, HSBC own Eversholt and the Royal Bank of Scotland owns Angel.

The original sale of the ROSCOs was mired in controversy after the British Rail managers who bought the businesses made millions of pounds by selling them on.

Engineers say no to 'Maglev'

ONE of the pre-eminent engineering institutions in the world has come out against the use of 'magnetic levitation' trains in the UK. In a report called 'Which way?' the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) favours improvements to conventional high speed rail technology.

It argues that Maglev is 'not a mature technology' and that it would be irresponsible to spend an estimated £30 billion to build such a system to provide a UK high-speed rail link.

ICE points out that the only commercial Maglev system in the world has run for two years from Shanghi airport to Hangzhou - and says it is not possible to assess its long term reliability. Therefore it concludes that 'choosing Maglev over conventional systems would be an unnecessary risk, for little gain'.

The Institution says the UK needs to consider a new north-south high-speed rail line to counteract the dominance of air travel between Scotland and London, where currently 93% of business travellers go by plane. However it recommends not Maglev but the conventional high-speed track used on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (recently renamed High Speed 1).

Maglev connects Shanghi airport to Hangzhou

The report, which examined the feasibility of magnetic levitation from a technical standpoint, follows the crash of a Maglev train in Germany in which 23 people died, as reported in the November Journal.

Pensions reform gets all-party support

WHEN Luton North MP Kelvin Hopkins tabled an early day motion (EDM) calling for the basic state pension to be raised to £114 immediately - and then linking it to earnings - he can hardly have anticipated the support he would get from MPs outside the Labour Party.

The EMD has attracted 103 signatures from MPs of which 14 are from Conservatives, 4 from The Democratic Unionist Party, 21 from the Liberal Democrats, 2 from Plaid Cymru, 1 from Respect, 3 from the Scottish National Party, 1 from the Social Democratic and Labour Party, 1 from Ulster Unionist Party - and 56 from the Labour Party.

Stansted: inadequate investment in rail services

Stansted expansion plans refused

THE application by the British Airport Authority to expand the use of Stansted Airport has been unanimously refused by the local (Uttlesford) District Council.

BAA wished to expand on its current agreement which has a limit of 25 million passengers per year. The grounds were noise levels, air quality and the overall quality of life. It was also turned down because BAA had 'failed to produce adequate proposals to improve the rail service and show how they would deal with increased road traffic in a sustainable way'.

Air travel is increasingly coming under scrutiny because of its environmental impact, with 'cheap flight' operators being particularly examined. Following the union recognition issues with Ryanair, the whole concept of cheap air travel is rapidly losing its image of providing 'people's travel'.

It has always been argued that 'bucket companies' are essentially democratic because they enable less-well-off people to travel. A recent survey at Stansted, however, has thrown doubt on this, showing that the average salary of passengers using this 'budget' airport is a staggering £47,000. It seems that cheap flights enable rich people to fly more, rather than enabling more poorer people to take to the air.

BAA will now decide whether to lodge an appeal against the decision.

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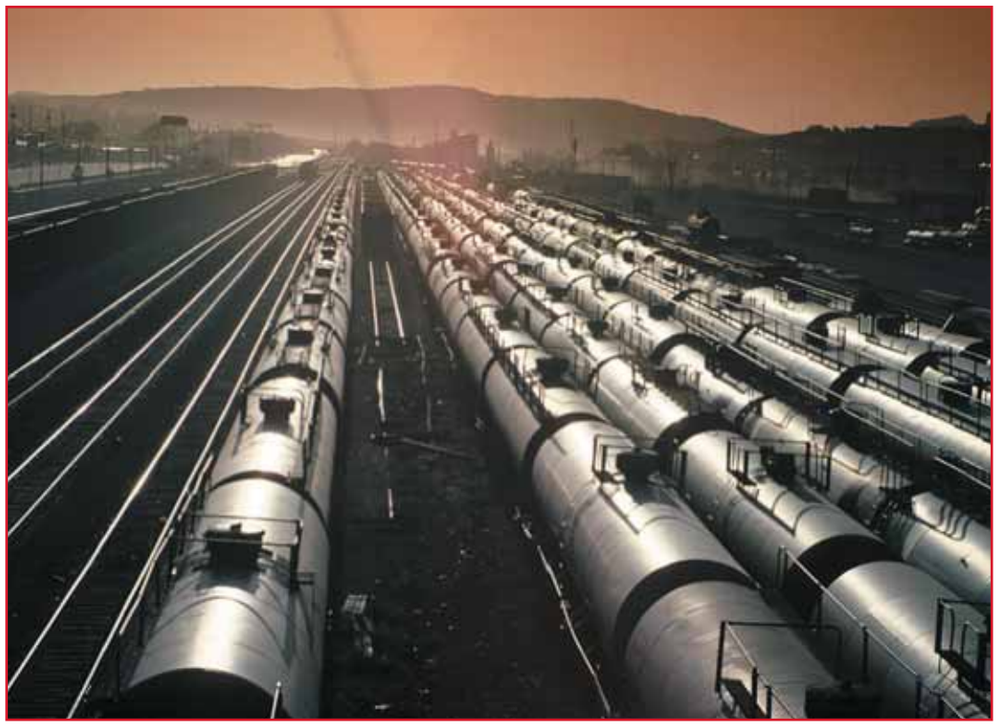

OPEN ACCESS COMPANIES – APPROACH WITH CARE...

...advises ASLEF executive committee member Dave Calfe.

IN THIS article Dave explains what 'open access' is about – and he advises any ASLEF member going to work for one to be very careful about the terms and conditions he or she is accepting. They aren't always as attractive as they appear to be, he warns ...

WHAT IS 'OPEN ACCESS'? 'Open access' refers to those companies which operate outside the government's franchise map. They were one of the key ideas of the Tory's 1990 rail privatisation programme. Like rail freight operators they don't need a franchise, but instead they bid for 'slots' within the overall timetable to operate their own services on the network through 'access agreements' with Network Rail. Any train operator can apply to run passenger services outside the franchise arrangements.

'Open access' include heritage companies, firms that carry out exercises like leaf-busting and de-icing as well as other passenger services.

The first such company was Hull Trains, but it has now been joined by a number of others, including GB Railfreight, Grand Central, FM Rail, Cotswold Rail and West Coast Railways.

IS ASLEF OPPOSED TO 'OPEN ACCESS'? Our union doesn't oppose any employer who is capable of, and willing to, employ train drivers on a decent salary, offering reasonable conditions and security of employment. We argue for the return of rail to public hands, but we're realistic enough to see that it's not going to happen in the short-term.

We want to see rail expand, and we don't like the idea of companies creaming off profits from a national resource. But we also accept that the world won't always fit what ASLEF wants. In these cases, our aim is to protect our members' interests.

That's why we warn drivers that the grass isn't always greener over the 'open access' hill – and we are very aware that although there are now about a dozen 'open access' rail companies, two have already gone to the wall.

WHO DRIVES 'OPEN ACCESS' TRAINS? Basically, 'open access' companies mainly recruit qualified drivers – usually ASLEF members working for a Train Operating Company (TOC) or a Freight Operating Company (FOC).

Mostly they don't put themselves to the expense of training because many companies are often small and are run on very tight profit margins. So it is always worth remembering if you are considering working for one of them, you are a very valuable asset indeed. On day one, just by turning up qualified, you have saved them thousands of pounds in training costs.

WHAT ARE CONDITIONS LIKE IN 'OPEN ACCESS' COMPANIES? The short answer is, 'Some are better than others.' They are varied, and sometimes the union only hears of the worst cases. But some reports are very disturbing.

We have heard rumours of companies that employ drivers regularly on shifts in excess of twelve hours This is not just an issue for the individual, but could have serious repercussions for us all in the event of a serious accident caused by fatigue.

Some others pay a daily rate regardless of the turn length – both of these examples are then used as a basis to bid for work from other established companies.

One difficulty is that union members often feel isolated in these small companies and don't tell union reps what is going on. In some cases they think they are letting the union down by taking these jobs. That's wrong.

We want to know about conditions – both for comparison purposes and because if they need improving – we are the only ones who can do it. But we need the evidence.

WHAT ARE THE UNION'S CONCERNS? In view of the fact that two companies have already gone to the wall and a third is in receivership, we have real concerns about what happens to our members in the event of bankruptcy. In a tiny company, there is literally nowhere else to go: it's not a question of a transfer or a change of duty. It's a case of the dole queue.

We're concerned at reports of drivers accepting a single flat fee for a day's work –

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without the working day being defined in advance.

Yes, we know the attraction that driving heritage trains has for some of our members, who feel that steam is real driving! But it's not a hobby, or something to pick up pin-money when you retire. It is someone's livelihood. Someone with a house to pay for - and a family to finance - just like you.

We are worried at a trend of recruiting retired drivers – and allowing drivers to 'moon-light' from other TOCs and FOCs on their rest days. All the work involves essential jobs that need to be addressed professionally and properly. We cannot entertain the situation where the greed of a few can possibly jeopardise safety. The same safety considerations apply no matter what unit we drive.

There is also the question of how these drivers retain their route and traction knowledge. What happens if they are involved in a safety of the line incident? How are their hours managed to conform to 'hidden 18'?

We are also concerned that most of these companies have no arrangements in place should a driver be unable to drive, which would result in a driver leaving the industry with very little compensation.

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS If you are thinking of joining one of these 'open access' companies, make sure that as a minimum you ask the following four questions (apart from the obvious) - and make sure you get the replies in writing before you join. We know of a few examples of drivers being assured of conditions verbally that never materialised once they'd joined. It's better to be clear at the very start exactly what you are buying – and for the 'buyer to beware'

- Will my pension be a final salary scheme – if it exists at all?
- What travel facilities will I have?
- Will I have to reclaim expenses for costs incurred on a daily basis – and if so, how long will it be before I am reimbursed?
- If I'm no longer able to drive - what arrangements are in place for my continued employment? Or what redundancy arrangements do you offer?

AND FINALLY At the worse, we could find ourselves in danger of eroding all the benefits we have secured for our members through negotiations with properly organised firms.

At the other end of the scale, we could find ourselves with civilised industrial relations, union recognition and acceptable conditions in an expanding market.

We're determined it should be the latter – but for yourself, make sure before you jump into the 'open access' area. And for the rest of us, make sure we know your working conditions if you do.

I must admit that one of the reasons I am writing this article was because I was really taken-aback when one 'open access' driver told me recently, 'Don't take one of these jobs unless you can afford to retire!'

- *Dave Calfe has represented District 6 (Midlands) on the Executive Committee for just twelve months. He can be contacted on (dcalfe@aslef.org.uk)*

Open Access workers could be left out in the cold

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Legal advice is worth the money

says Vicky Phillips, the head of employment rights at Thompson Solicitors. Of course, she would say that, wouldn't she? But here she offers facts, not opinion, to prove the point ….

A SURVEY by the Law Society has found that the majority of people believe that having a solicitor's advice on the value of their compensation claim was 'very important' and over half of the survey respondents said the level of compensation they received was higher for having had a solicitor's help.

Legal representation also resulted in fairer treatment by employers or other defendants in the claim, those surveyed said. Most people would not feel confident in trying to pursue a compensation claim alone.

Of course lawyers and those that represent them would say that wouldn't they? Just as Aslef would want to shout about a survey which shows that the majority of the public want train drivers to be better paid, or better respected. We all want what is in the best interests of our professions.

But the point the Law Society research makes is that individuals who have been injured due to the negligence of others should not be left on their own to try to secure compensation.

INSURERS PREFER AMATEURS

The Association of British Insurers recently conducted their own survey which claimed that those who do not have legal representation actually get more compensation that those who use solicitors. As surveys go, it was a pretty meaningless one, but it was also massively biased towards the insurance industry's agenda of cutting lawyers out of the compensation system and leaving claimants to fend for themselves.

That way they can deny liability and offer meagre amounts of compensation without coming up against someone who might just see through their tactics.

Thompsons has many examples of clients who tried going it alone before seeking help from their union's legal scheme. How many Aslef members would know not just what their injury might be 'worth' but what expenses and other outlays resulting from their accident they are entitled to claim for?

CASE IN POINT

There was the union member who suffered whiplash in a car accident and thought she'd save time and money by dealing with the insurer of the other driver herself.

When she received a response from the insurer, after nearly six months of badgering, it was an offer of just £500. This in spite of the fact that she had been off work for several weeks and had to pay for physiotherapy and other treatment to ease the pain of her injury.

She came to Thompsons on the advice of her union rep and within days of receiving our letter, setting out what damages the injured woman should receive, the insurers upped their offer to £1,250.

But when we obtained the medical evidence of the injury they conceded she should be paid even more, and the claim eventually settled for £2,500.

CLAIMS ARE FALLING

We all read about the so-called compensation culture and how compensation claims are supposedly out of control. During the festive period these stories become even more ridiculous – the Christmas parties that are cancelled for fear of someone suing when the photocopier gives way beneath them, the mince pies that must be checked for content and temperature.

But the reality is that personal injury claims are falling every year. What these stories are really about is the powerful insurance lobby, in league with the Daily Mail and other sections of the press, trying to spread a general, and very 'British' distaste for claiming compensation. This no matter how serious the injury and how negligent the employer or other party whose actions led to the injury.

There appears to be a view that getting damages, no matter how seriously someone is injured, is like winning the lottery. The reality is that while employers continue to maim and kill their workers, the right to claim damages and the right to do so with the support of a lawyer, must remain.

Suggestions that office parties have been cancelled for fear of compensation claims are ridiculous Photo BBC

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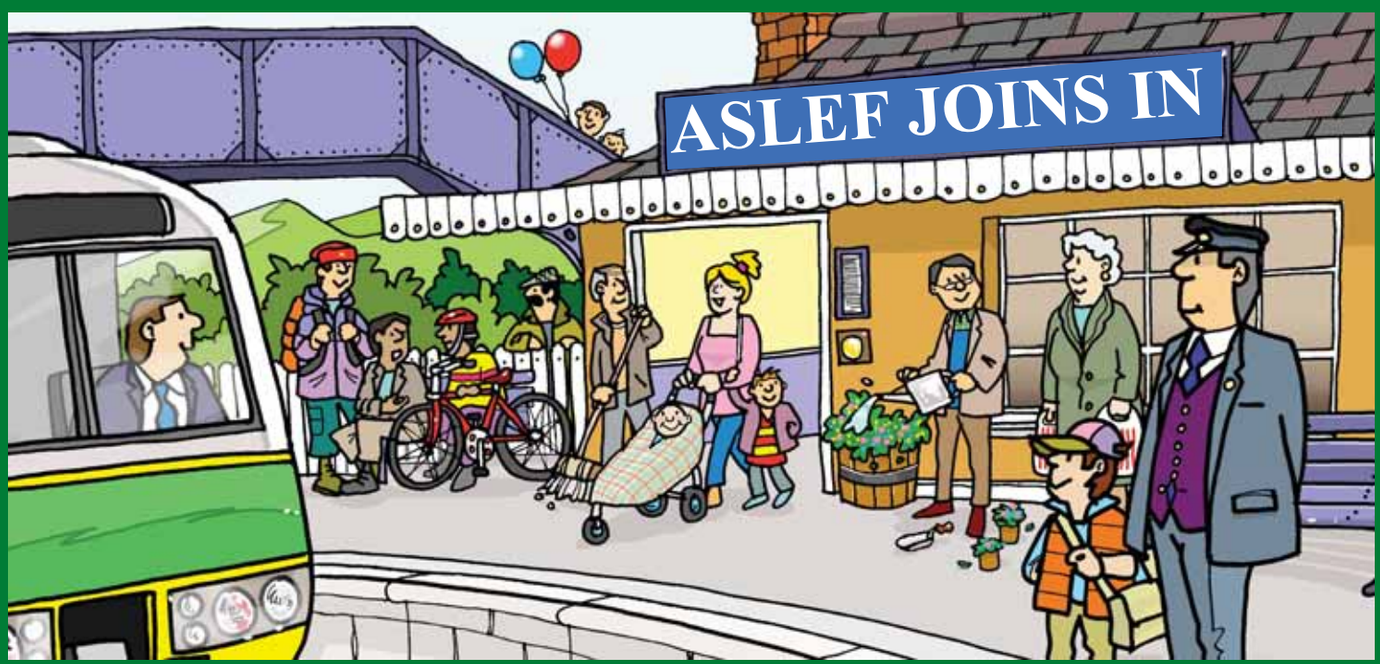
GETTING INVOLVED WITH ...



COMMUNITY RAIL

In the December Journal we outlined the positive and negative arguments about Community Rail from an ASLEF perspective. This month John Clark, secretary of our Darlington Branch, puts a case for the union to become actively involved in these projects.
First he argues that the operating companies specialise in cutting services and that the government has neither the influence nor the appetite to improve the situation. He goes on to say that at least Community Rail has ideas and enthusiasm - and explains why his branch has decided to take an active part in their local initiatives ....

A LONG time ago, before he became prime Minister, Tony Blair proudly declared that he wanted a 'publicly owned, publicly accountable railway'. Sadly, like other promises to improve the lot of anyone 'enjoying' Britain's transport system, it has been quietly dumped. It seems our esteemed leader would prefer to pay three to five times over the odds to the privateers to continue milking the Tories railway debacle rather than have Railtrack's mountain of debt (transferred to Network Rail) on the Treasury's books.

The downside of this ostrich-like behaviour by those entrusted to solve the nation's transport headache is that one of the biggest 'problems' - the railway - is going nowhere. The dead hands of classics-educated mandarins and career civil servants (who would doubtless prefer to be doing something else) have taken over from the SRA, and their mandate is to keep a lid on costs - at any cost.

The withdrawal of Cross Country services north of Manchester; pulling out from financing the fourth vehicle on the West Yorkshire 333's; the cutback of local services in the Southwest, and the perpetuation of the dreaded railbus – all these are indicators that the DfT does not see the railway as having a part in the ever increasing demand for mobility. So we'll just have to chuck 'em all onto the roads.

GOVERNMENT: A LACK OF INTEREST

Worryingly, it seems that the Treasury and the DfT don't care. They are more concerned with absolving themselves from the business of undertaking improvements to the local railway. They see it as the 'problem' part that no one in authority has wanted to tackle for as long as anyone can remember - other than by shutting it down completely. Franchises are now being awarded on the basis of the biggest pay-back or the lowest subsidy: to hell with actually making real improvement. In fact, as the pips begin to squeak, cut-

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backs are increasingly likely.

The government may be reluctant to direct the future railway policy, but there is no shortage of other groups inside and outside the industry who would be only too willing to do so. Some have good intentions; some just want to feather their own nest. Witness the calls for vertical integration of track and train, just so long as it's on their company-by-company basis (GNER & South West Trains have been very vocal about this) rather a national one (Network Rail). Into this vacuum has stepped The Association of Community Rail Partnerships (AcoRP) with its 'Community Rail' initiative.

SCEPTICAL – BUT INTERESTED

Darlington, the lads (and Helen!) were sceptical. It looked very much as though this was an attempt to take over the running of local railways up and down the country. It looked as though lower standards ('derogations') were to be the order of the day. It looked like voluntary working or part time staff. It looked like an attempt to hive off much of the financing of local rail, to cash-strapped local authorities.

The Treasury and the DfT must have thought Christmas had come early – and best of all, if it all went pear-shaped, they wouldn't be to blame. 'Not in our remit any more, dear boy.'

It looked to us like seriously bad news.

So it was with some reservations in mind that we invited Dr Paul Salveson (who had developed the Community Rail initiative from scratch) to our branch to give our members a presentation. He was accompanied by Neil Buxton, its General Manager, and Tony Smeare from the 'Esk Valley Development Company', which looks for funding for improvements.

AN INVITATION TO ACORP

They were at pains to make it clear that they do not want to take over from the existing operators of local lines, but to give them a more secure future. I'm not sure how committed the DfT is to this concept - but I'm 100% certain the Treasury is only interested in one thing - the one-third cut in subsidy that is being suggested.

Following a discussion after the meeting, our branch decided to affiliate to the Heritage (Bishop Auckland) line Community Rail Partnership, which is formed of local authorities, user groups, Network Rail and other parties.

It has set about changing the fortunes of a train service which had been hacked to half the previous frequency - and was still running on track overdue renewal from 1984! By using our knowledge of what needs to be done, and where, we have, with the other partners, jointly developed a plan to improve the quality of the service and the condition of the route. What's in it for us? At the very least, it's going to keep us in a job.

More recently, our branch carried the ASLEF banner at the ACoRP Community Rail Festival at Darlington, where we made a lot of new friends and some useful new contacts.

GET INVOLVED, OR GET IGNORED

But just when you think that one threat is being addressed, along comes another showing just how fluid the situation is at the moment. Even Community Rail initiatives can be undermined by empire builders elsewhere. The opportunist authorities on Teesside are determined to impose a light rail tram onto the existing network. Fine, except it will hinder attempts to increase freight on rail from Teesport, if it uses non-standard electrification, preventing future freight from gaining paths on our increasingly clogged main lines by deploying 25Kv haulage. It will also destroy the Bishop Auckland service, which BR recognised was not viable as an isolated service as long ago as 1982. The promoters

of this £150 million madness are determined to suppress any consideration of alternatives, and are uninterested in what damage they wreak elsewhere.

It's unclear where community rail will take the local railway scene. A unified, nationally funded and coordinated railway is more efficient, both operationally and in cash terms. Until that returns, the 'bean counters' will look at other ways to cut costs. For as long as the railway remains in private hands, as many decisions about its future will be taken from outside as will be from within. We must engage with these outside influences, or be ignored.

If other ASLEF branches likely to be affected can also get involved, they will be in a stronger position to influence their future for the better. It's got to be preferable to leaving the people at the top unchallenged as they pretend that everything is tickety-boo.

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Your **journey** starts here...

QUALIFIED TRAIN DRIVERS

Starting Salary: £31,226 per annum increasing to £34,228 per annum upon satisfactory completion of probationary period + Bonus and Retainer.
To be based in Bicester, Oxford

Direct Rail Services (DRS) is a successful, innovative company with an excellent reputation for the delivery of first-class services. DRS was established in 1995 and began with only 5 members of traincrew all based at one depot. Our continued success in the rail industry means that 10 years on we have traincrew based at eight locations throughout the country and are establishing a new depot at Bicester, Oxford subject to new business contracts. Due to this further expansion we are now looking for qualified train drivers to join DRS at this exciting time.

With 2 years post qualifying experience as a train driver, you will be an enthusiastic and flexible individual who carries out their driver duties to a high standard and ensures that they adhere to all relevant safety requirements. Using your experience of the rail industry you will develop and maintain all necessary route knowledge as well as studying and gaining a first class understanding of our safety regulations. Following training you will carry out driver, trainman / woman and RST duties and will be required to obtain a Personal Track Safety Certificate to maintain and enhance your existing skills. Experience of driving freight trains, would be highly desirable. Successful applicants should hold a full UK driving licence and meet the required GO/RT3251 group medical standard.

MAINTENANCE FITTERS

Salary: C£32,000 per annum + Bonus and Retainer.
To be based in Bicester, Oxford

Our fleet of locomotives has grown from 5 class 20 locomotives to a varied fleet of class 20, 37, 47 and 66 locomotives.The maintenance of all our locomotives and rolling stock is performed in house by our fully qualified and dedicated Engineering Maintenance Team. Our aim is to continuously develop our business whilst providing a safe, secure and reliable transport service. In order to provide this service we are now looking to enhance our complement of Maintenance Fitters at a new depot at Bicester, Oxford subject to new business contracts.

Reporting to the Traction and Rolling Stock Supervisor, we are looking for experienced and capable Fitters/Electricians to be responsible for the electrical and mechanical maintenance (including major and minor repairs) of DRS locomotives and Rolling Stock. The role also involves attending trackside incidents and providing technical back-up in accordance with company policy and standards.

We are looking for Mechanical or Electrical time-served apprentices with at least one to two years post qualifying experience, knowledge of the rail industry would be desirable and the ability to gain a Personal Track Safety certificate is essential. The job involves shift work with rosters formulated locally - patterns will be discussed at interview. Successful candidates must hold a full UK driving licence and meet the required GE/RT8067 group medical standard.

The above positions offer an attractive salary, bonus scheme, healthcare scheme, 25 days annual leave, final salary pension scheme and relocation assistance.
If you wish to apply for either position please contact The Recruitment Section on 01228 406682 for an application pack.
Successful candidates will be required to undertake security vetting including nationality, reference and identity checks.

Closing date: 29th January 2007
Applicants received prior to the closing date will be given early consideration.

direct rail services
www.directrailservices.com

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ASLEF NORTH OF THE BORDER

OBAN CONFIRMS NEED FOR LABOUR-UNION LINKS ***- a report from Jim Lafferty from the Motherwell Branch on this year's Scottish Labour Party Conference***

At the end of November I had the pleasure of attending the Scottish Labour Party Conference in Oban as a delegate for ASLEF. Our union's other delegates were Regional Organiser Kevin Lindsay and 'Jack's Pal'- Rab Wickstead. Naturally we only gained access after the customary chaos of accreditation which also overshadowed the Labour Conference in Manchester.

It was an enjoyable few days, and we had the opportunity of hearing Kevin speaking at a 'Revitalise' fringe meeting which debated ways to bring more accountability into the Labour party and of giving more power to the membership.

In the conference proper we were pleased to hear Ministers say that they were looking at ways to bring the railways back into public ownership as a non-profit making organisation. They also outlined proposals for new lines, including Edinburgh and Glasgow Airport links, an Airdrie to Bathgate Line and the Borders Line. Such initiatives would be good both for the country and for ASLEF members as they will provide security and more jobs within our industry.

During the weekend it was heartening to see so many fellow trade unionists, MPs and MSPs who recognised both Kevin and ASLEF and who were willing to seek out and listen to our opinions on a variety of issues within the labour movement. This is in no small measure because of the work done by Kevin at various levels over the years. For a relatively small union we 'punch well above our weight' – which, if you know Kevin and myself, is some punch!

The conference strengthened my belief that trade unions must maintain their links with the Labour Party. We can and should be involved in shaping and changing policies - not only on transport but on a wide range of issues.

After attending the conference I feel that we are back where we should be as a campaigning union: looking after our members, representing the wider community and campaigning for a fairer deal for all.

Thanks again to both Kevin and 'Jacks Pal', Wee Rab, for an enjoyable time.

MSPs back ASLEF's campaigns in the Scottish Parliament

ASLEF is lobbying to bring ScotRail back into public ownership

HALF AN HOUR FROM GLASGOW TO EDINBURGH?

Ministers in Scotland have established a strategic transport projects review which will consider a £1.5 billion high-speed rail link to cut the journey between Glasgow and Edinburgh to 30 minutes from its current 50. The review, however, will not be completed until late in 2008.

'I can't see how it can take two years to decide if it is a good idea to have a 15 minute service between the two cities, modelled on the French TGV network and travelling at up to 220mph,' says ASLEF's regional organiser Kevin Lindsay. 'Most of Scotland will tell you that today.'

Kevin says such a new line would ease traffic congestion on the M8 and boost the economies of both cities.

Officials working on the project are believed to be studying a number of routes for the service. The most likely is the line through West Lothian and central Lanarkshire, passing through Cambuslang, Bellshill, Shotts, West Calder and South Livingston .

Another possibility is to extend the route currently being built between Airdrie and Bathgate.

ROW OVER EDINBURGH TRAM PROJECT

Edinburgh Council leader Ewan Aitken has launched a scathing attack on the SNP's Kenny MacAskill over his opposition to the city's tram project. He claims that a light rail network for the capital showed 'both vision and aspiration', adding, 'With trams and the Edinburgh Airport Rail Link, which the SNP is also opposed to, we have the opportunity to invest more than £1 billion in connecting the capital to the rest of the nation.'

The SNP is opposed to the scheme and instead wants to invest £4 million every year on bus services.

BLAIR HITS OUT AT NATIONALISTS

The Prime Minster hit out at the Scottish Nationalist Party at the conference, saying there were only two seriously possible outcomes: 'a Scottish Nationalist Party Government or a Labour one' and he went on to warn that, 'Should the SNP win, they are pledged to introduce an Independence Bill into the Scottish Parliament; and not on any vague timescale, but in their first 100 days.

'Already they are publishing plans for separation: separate currency, separate pensions and social security systems, leaving NATO.

'I hear you scoff: yes, sure they say it, but they're not serious. They wouldn't do it. But the fact they are saying it and with utter precision shows they are deadly serious and would do it.'

He stressed the vision of Labour in Scotland which was, 'Together not apart. Social justice not separation. The union of common peoples with common hopes and shared values - not the bitter wrench of an idea whose time has gone.'

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PRESTON BROTHERS REUNITE

SATURDAY 25 November saw another memorable gathering of Preston Railway Staff organised by branch members.

Legends of the past and present descended on Lostock Hall Catholic Club for a reunion and to celebrate the retirement of drivers Keith Holding and Dennis Chatwin – both of whom have completed 45 year's service.

Midway through the afternoon the branch secretary made presentations of ASLEF plaques and coal trains to our retiring colleagues.

RSI Peter Whelan and train manager Ernie Tofts were also presented with gifts in recognition of their 45 and 32 years of railway service.

Thanks to the staff at the club for keeping us suitably refreshed and to Janice for providing the buffet. Same venue later next year. See you there!

G. Mawdsley *Secretary - Preston Branch*

RECOGNISING LOYALTY: (from left to right) Bros Ernie Tofts, Peter Whelan. Dennis Chatwin and Keith Holding

EASTLEIGH – THANKS KEITH

KEITH BAYLISS has written to the General Secretary to say that he is giving up his position as secretary of the union's Eastleigh branch. He says, 'thanks for allowing me to experience life as a Branch Officer but due to outside commitments I am not able to give as much time to the job as I would like to. I believe it is only right to give somebody the opportunity to be Branch Secretary who can devote more time to the task than myself.'

Keith would like to thank his colleagues at Eastleigh and other branches for their support over the last year.

IS HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF?

A report from Mick Whelan, Organiser, District 6

IT IS over a decade since pure political dogma caused the sectorisation and ultimate privatisation of the railways. There was never any economic rationale for the change – except to creating wealth for wide-boy investors, consultants, lawyers and accountants.

I won't rehearse all the arguments again, but it is worth reminding ourselves about the Railtrack debacle and the many safety infringements. This was highlighted in a recent TV documentary on Potters Bar – which could have been avoided in a truly vertically integrated railway system.

GNER's well publicised problems call into question the whole refranchising process - especially when the subsidies forecast to the TOC's are more than expected.

It is often said that Drivers have gained more out of the market created by privatisation than other grades. An active union like ours would hardly miss the opportunities that arose from the chronic understaffing created by sectorisaton and the various severance programs.

But the real question has less to do with money than with the human cost in stress and emotion when the industry is carved up.

2007 will see many franchises being recast under the outcomes of various route utilisation works that has been undertaken by the SRA and subsequently the DFT.

Many of us remember friends and family who had worked together for years being displaced or re-badged. The process generated much animosity as not everyone ended up in the sector or company they wished; inevitably bad feeling is generated and was then exacerbated by the numerous pay scales subsequently generated. Sadly the process continues, and members want to know

- Is my job safe?
- Who will I be working for?
- What type of work will I be doing in future?
- Will my terms and conditions remain the same?
- Will TUPE apply?

In a safety critical industry have we considered the risk of people worrying about their futures?

The information we have been able to give up to now is somewhat tempered by the actual bidding process itself and business confidentiality. Meanwhile many new drivers we have helped generate will experience this uncertainly for the first time – and senior drivers who have transferred into a different company (but could not carry their service with them) will worry about being displaced.

That is why I ask the question: 'Is history repeating itself?'

MOBILE PHONES The 21st century is the ear of instant communication – and especially the mobile phone. We have recently noticed a vast increase in the number of drivers being sanctioned for their use – and sanctions involving mobiles are becoming increasingly serious, even including dismissal.

In post-incident investigations, phone bills are being matched against Trust to try and The HMRI have clearly indicated they may prosecute in these cases.

I know trains run late or the railway infrastructure breaks down - but I do not want to see another driver lose their position over a phone call. I would urge increased awareness of the consequences of using your mobile phone.

POTTERS BAR CRASH: Could it have been avoided? Photo: Andrew Wiard

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KEEPING TRACK *WHAT THE UNION WAS DOING 100 AND 50 YEARS AGO*

As we look through the pages of ASLEF's Locomotive Journal 100 and 50 years ago, we see that inter-union rivalry is no new thing – and, 50 years ago the wise Mr Pullen had some timely warnings about the dangers of watching too much television…!

100 YEARS AGO ....

H. Parfitt recounts his first meeting with the ASRS, a precursor to today's RMT. It doesn't go well …

'On Friday, the 28th, I was a "co-opted" member of our E.C., and as such attended a joint meeting of our E.C. and that of the ASRS (Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants). This was the shortest or briefest meeting I ever attended, for before we had time to warm our seats we were all out again, yet that brief sitting probably had as much effect on the future as others which have lasted all day. Six items had been previously submitted by the other side for consideration. Our General Secretary had given written notice that two of the items would not be entertained by our side as matter for discussion. They were not in accordance with Clause J, but were suggestive of mud-slinging, of which railwaymen have had about enough. In spite of the written notice we found on taking our seats that those objectionable items had been placed on the agenda.

'Our President called attention to this, and again informed the other side that we absolutely refused to discuss those items or enter into them at all. Assuming, I suppose, that our E.C. only attend joint meetings to be dictated to like children, the other side persisted in going on with it, whereupon our E.C. did what any other self-respecting representative body would have done – they picked up their belongings and retired. Some of us did expect a little show of friendly feeling from the other side, but to quote a song I have heard somewhere:-

"They didn't show what we wanted to see, So we all walked out again!"

50 YEARS AGO ...

D. K. Pullen, on the magazine's 'Page for Motormen', warns that television and society don't mix …

'Just for once, let's have a rest from the tedium of the P.T. & R. scheme and take a look around outside our own immediate domain. It can, and doubtless will, be argued by some well-meaning souls that we have quite enough on our plate – what with modernisation, wages, redundancy and so on – to keep us fully occupied for some while, without getting involved in political issues.

Indeed, some of our members appear to hold fast to the ancient view that the common worker should know his place and not "meddle with things he knows nothing about". They claim, in all seriousness, that some people are far too eager to play at politics when they could be usefully engaged in something far more profitable. Such as watching television, we may suppose? It is, of course, useful to be able detect at a glance the soap powder which will bring Brightness, Even on Perfect Whiteness.

Professional "Gift-of-the- Gabbers" like Woodrow Wyatt, Muggeridge, Crawley and the rest continue to discuss for us the problems of the day, usually with just the right amount of bias to influence the innocent viewer –victim into the acceptance of a particular opinion without at the same time giving too much political offence. But where is all this taking us? We stand in grave danger of becoming a nation of expert televiewers, content to let the "other feller", regardless of his capabilities, get on with the job of ordering our lives for us."

(Extracts selected and edited by Jane Pimlott)

OBITUARIES

BLASCO (HERMAN) HERMOGENES FERNANDES

It is with deep regret I have to report the passing of Herman Fernandes whist at work recently.

Herman, who came to the railway in 1965 as one of the original second men, was a fixture at Stonebridge Park and a true railway character.

He was a caring compassionate man with boundless energy who had the ability to bring a smile to the face of everyone he met.

A loyal ASLEF member, Herman was always concerned with the welfare of his friends. He was never angry or indignant on his own behalf - but would be quick to raise the issues of others.

Herman brought great pleasure to our working lives. There are too few people in this modern driven industry who can maintain his sense of driving fraternity and community.

Herman kept his professional life separate from his family life but he was proud of his wife Laura and their son Jonathan becoming a barrister. The number of friends and colleagues at his funeral showed the genuine affection and respect Herman in which he was held. We hope it will give Herman's family some comfort at this difficult time.

A.Wells Willesden Branch

MIKE BRADBURY – A LOST FRIEND

It is with great sadness that I have to report the death of Driver Mike Bradbury at the age of 44. Despite being a relative newcomer to the railway, Mike was well liked and respected by his many friends at Waterloo as was demonstrated by the outstanding turn out at his funeral service. Although having always previously been self employed Mike felt he had found his niche as a Driver at Waterloo and embraced his job and his membership of ASLEF with great enthusiasm. Mess room banter, branch meetings and social events, Mike was always involved and he was proud to stand with his friends and comrades on the Waterloo picket line. He will be missed but not forgotten. May he rest in peace.

Marz Colombini Secretary - Waterloo Nine Elms

RICHARD (DICK) HALL – DIED AT WORK

It is with deep regret I report the passing of Dick Hall. He died at work, which is sad but possibly appropriate as he was a true railwayman and loved his role and the industry.

Dick came to Old Oak in 1971 after working for Rolls Royce. He then moved to Stonebridge Park by way of Basingstoke.

Dick was interested in all aspects of the railway. Away from work he often took trips with his dad to see old engines or railway he had not worked over. He also an interest in model railways.

Dick had an abiding care for his colleagues and served ASLEF with great distinction at LDC and Company Council level for many years, operating with great diligence during periods of great uncertainty for the freight industry.

Dick not only devoted much of his own time to ASLEF but was also a valued member of the committee of Stonebridge Park ASLEF Welfare club.

The thoughts and condolences of his colleagues and friends go to his father and two daughters at this difficult time. Hopefully the generations and numbers of drivers who attended his funeral will give some comfort to them.

A. Wells Willesden Branch

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OBITUARIES

ALAN BUFFEL – A FRIEND AND A FOOTBALLER

IT IS with great sadness that I report the death of a personal friend, someone who was also a friend to many people within and outside our union.

Alan was a buff ex-Garston, Edge Hill and Crewe man who died tragically doing what he loved best - playing football.

The mere fact that he was playing first team football at the age of 51 shows his commitment and dedication. These were qualities he showed regularly towards his job, his friends and his work colleagues - but most of all to his family, of whom Alan was always very proud.

In over 25 years of knowing Alan I never heard him say a bad word about anybody. Nothing was too much trouble for him. If I rang him, he would always get back in touch offering practical assistance or sensible advice. He could always be relied upon to bend over backwards to help a charity - especially if it meant playing football.

Alan leaves behind his wife Li-Lyn, his son Lee and daughter Sarah. I would like to say on behalf of the many other friends and colleagues of Alan who will miss him dearly, 'You will never be forgotten.'

Alan Donnelly Edge Hill Branch

J.J. McDERMOTT – ACCIDENT IN KENYA

It is with great sadness that I have to tell all our members of the passing of Driver John James McDermott (affectionately known as 'J.J'). John had been on holiday in Kenya to do a bit of fishing (his favourite hobby) when he was involved in a car crash and sadly passed away.

A memorial service was held for John and the turn-out showed how respected he was. He was a driver at Yoker, then Edinburgh and finally Fort William.

I would like to take this opportunity to pass on our thoughts and prayers to John's family in this time of sadness – and to apologise for the delay in making this announcement

Thomas McAllen assistant branch secretary - Edinburgh No. 2

WALLACE GRAY – 'WALT'

IT IS with regret that I have to report the passing away of retired Driver Brother Wallace Gray – 'Walt' as he was affectionately known – who sadly passed away just a few days before his seventieth birthday.

Walt started his railway career in 1952 and was cleaning for ten or more years before leaving to serve in the army from 1955 for two years. He returned to the footplate when he completed his National Service and then remained in Immingham until he retired in 1998 after completing some 45 years service. He was a stalwart of ASLEF to the end.

One of Walt's passions was Country and Western music and I'm told he had literally thousands of CDs of his favourite music. His other passion was fishing and I understand he was out with one of his old workmates fishing a few days before he succumbed to the illness that led to his untimely death.

We send our heartfelt condolences to his wife Brenda and his family.

D.A. Doherty Reporter – Immingham Branch

D.G. THOMAS – 'CRUNCHIE'

IT IS with a heavy heart that I have to report the death of Brother D. G. Thomas (affectionately known as 'Crunchie') who was a member of ASLEF's Rhymney branch. David passed away on 28 November 2006.

He had only just taken early retirement and was looking forward to spending quality time with his family. We all offer our heart-felt condolences and best wishes to his wife and family.

David Kitt Secretary - Rhymney branch

LES ('PEANUTS') MORRISON

LES had schoolboy trials for Portsmouth Football Club and had it not been for a bad knee injury he could have played for the first team. However he played for the Railway team – and was still good enough to make Railway Rifle Club team a force to be reckoned with.

Les and I both joined the railway and ASLEF on the 28 December 1953, qualifying as drivers at Effingham Junction on the 20 September 1962. Les was never active within the union, but he was a loyal and dedicated member.

During the 1982 strike he was on picket duties at the main entrance to Fratton Depot when one strike-breaker drove his car at speed towards the entrance. Les jumped in front of it and thankfully was only hit a glancing blow. His attitude was, 'no-one goes in on my watch!'.

His contempt for those strike-breakers remained all of his life and it was an irony when one of them rose to become his depot master. It made no difference to Les. He always held his nose when he came into contact with anyone of them, no matter who they were! He lived life to the full but he had a lighter and very humorous side, as those who went on the numerous holidays with the Railway Rifle Club, which he helped organise, will remember. His forte involved a sombrero, a guitar and a slow slide to the floor!

You don't get many like Les Morrison.

Len Worboys Retired

New ASLEF Regalia for 2007!

ASLEF thermal mugs

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These attractive memory sticks have a capacity of 128MB. They come with a USB cable, a key ring attachment and a lanyard at a cost of £10

BUY ALL THREE FOR £17 – A DISCOUNT OF £1 PER ITEM!

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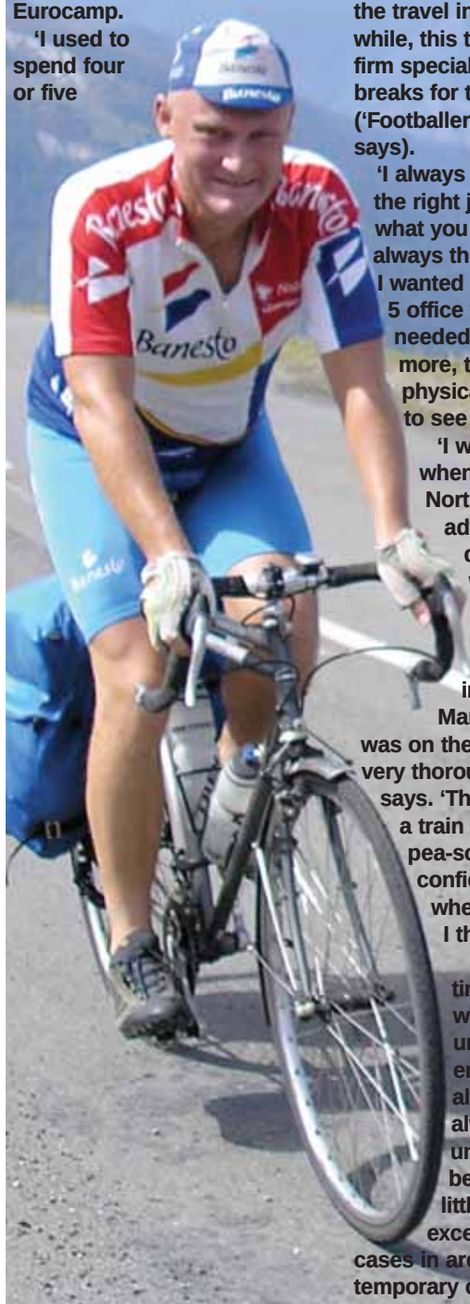
'SCARY DAVE' KEEPS ON THE MOVE ...

'It took me a long time to find the right job – but I think I have, now,' says Dave Vaughan. He's been driving trains out of Manchester Victoria for six years and says it's a good way to earn a living. He should know – he's worked and travelled over two continents!

'Scary Dave' as he's known at work, still lives in Knutsford in Cheshire where he was born, but he's always had the travel bug. When he left school he worked for Eurocamp.



'I used to spend four or five months in France sorting out problems for the campers, and the rest back in Knutsford taking bookings and making arrangements. It sounds glamourous but I knew I wasn't going to stay long. There's a lot of paper work and – unless you own the firm! - the money's poor.'

So Dave moved into industry, working for Unilever on the Wirral and various engineering firms in Stockport. After being made redundant, he went back to the travel industry for a while, this time for an elite firm specialising in luxury breaks for the very rich ('Footballers and Lords!' he says).

'I always knew I wasn't in the right job – but finding what you want to do is always the problem. I knew I wanted to get out of 9 to 5 office work and I needed to get outside more, to do something physical and to be able to see an end product.

'I was still dithering when I saw that First North Western was advertising for train drivers. Happily, I went for it.'

After an initial assessment at Crewe and interview in Manchester, Dave was on the books. 'It was very thorough training,' he says. 'The first time I took a train out was in a real pea-souper, but I felt confident that I knew where I was. At least, I thought I did!'

It was the first time Dave had worked in a unionised environment, although he had always been a union member. 'To be honest, there's little unions can do except individual cases in areas like temporary office work. That's not a criticism, it's a fact.

'I think working in places without unions makes me appreciate ASLEF more,' Dave says. 'I really value its representation and negotiation abilities – but the union is also a genuine brotherhood based on shared experiences. I don't want to sound like a cheap advert, but it makes a real difference to all our working lives. Perhaps we don't always appreciate it enough.'

After only three years on the job, Dave became an Instructor – something to which he is clearly well-suited. He's an outgoing, lively and positive man with natural and enthusiastic communication skills. 'Mates said I'd find train driving lonely when I started – but in fact it's a really sociable life. I've never met a bigger bunch of extroverts than the people I trained with! Besides, you meet up in the mess-room and you're in contact with the guard. It's not isolated. '

When Dave isn't driving trains he spends a lot of his time travelling on them, often with his cycle in the goods van. 'This sense of a train driver's fraternity doesn't stop at Dover,' Dave says. 'I've talked to train drivers in Italy and the Czech Republic as well as Australia and New Zealand - and always felt a sense of belonging. Last September I found myself chatting to a team of SNCF drivers who were peddling bikes up the Pyrenees. Owing to my shortage of breath at the time, it wasn't a long conversation!'

He makes sure he takes advantage of his overseas rail benefits. 'I think a lot of 'non-safeguarded' drivers assume they're not entitled to it,' he says. 'It's a real bonus as far as I'm concerned.'

'I enjoy travelling,' he says. 'Part of the joy is what I was saying about the union. I don't just enjoy it because it's new and interesting – it also makes you value what you have at home. We complain too easily at times and take things for granted which we shouldn't.'

Then all too soon it's time for Dave to pick up his ruck-sack, don his woolly hat and set off walking into the rain. 'It's only a bit of water,' he says – an attitude that sums up his optimistic and open attitude to life. Not at all scary, in fact ...!

Would you be prepared to be featured in future editions of this column, or know someone who would be a good subject? If you do, please let us know at the ASLEF Journal, 9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 6AB or journal@aslef.org.uk

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YOU TELL US

These are the pages where you talk to us. We welcome your letters, either by mail to the Journal at 9 Arkwright Road London NW3 6AB or by email to journal@aslef.org.uk

Because of our space constraints, please try to keep your contributions as short as you can.

This month we continue our STAR LETTER feature. The immensely lucky winner will pocket a rich range of ASLEF regalia!

Thanks for appeal help

ON behalf of Nottingham Branch and Bro Paul Cann, I would like to thank the union's Hardship Fund and all the many branches and individuals who donated their money to the Paul Cann appeal.

So far we have raised over £5,500, which is a great tribute to all of us. It shows that unity is not only strength, but also compassion – especially when you consider that it is more than the payout Paul received from Central Trains. Unfortunately, because he left EWS in 2002, Central would only take into account his service since then.

When the branch secretary Bro Pete Coles and Bro Jay Fowler went to meet Paul to give him the cheque, he was very touched and grateful for the money we have raised.

Nicholas Jacobs Reporter - Nottingham Branch

Fares up, folk down

Once again this government cannot make up its mind what it really wants to do about transport. On one hand it keeps claiming to be a great supporter of public transport – and on the other it allows the operating companies to hype prices so that it becomes unrealistic to do so.

At the risk of repeating myself, how is it possible that these companies can make vast profits, while the government (on their inflated wages) are incapable of running it?

I see this as another attack on pensioners' meagre pittances, making it impossible for them to travel – except from being driven further into the poverty trap.

Peter Smith Retired Member – London

Eye care ASLEF

READING the letter from David Naismith in the November issue raises fears for my own generation. My career on the footplate commenced in 1950 and concluded with my retirement in 1998. I spent 15 years on steam looking into a white hot furnace and then, at night, peering into total darkness. This must have been detrimental to our eyesight. We are now advised of the good sense of wearing sunglasses.

I know two ex-colleagues who suffer from Macular Degeneration - and I believe many of our stalwarts throughout our country may be affected by this industrial hazard. Is it possible to get eminent eye specialist advice on this issue?

Thanks to David for the alert from many veterans. We much appreciate having ASLEF in our corner.

Mr Trevor Perkins Retired Member

Wrong routes

HAVING just received my diary for next year I was disappointed to see that it has the out of date railway maps at the back. As the premier professional union for professional train drivers it looks rather amateurish.

Graham Martin-Royle Driver – Hastings Branch

Best wishes to CC

I WOULD like to congratulate Tommy O'Hanlon and Andy Fergusson on being re-instated to the Scotrail Company Council. I'd like to also take the opportunity of wishing all the Company Council 'all the very best' with their new pay talks for 2007. I trust that they will deliver the best deal possible for the drivers of Scotrail.

Wullie Simpson Ayr Branch

Black mark for record DVD

THE Railway Magazine recently issued a free DVD of the record breaking Virgin Pendolino run from Glasgow to London- an event which raised a deal of money for charity.

I was enjoying the DVD until it moved on to the 'cab view' section as the train departed Glasgow. I was shocked at the incessant talking. It was explained before departure that the two drivers were accompanied by two other 'helpers' so there were an alleged four people in the cab - the very maximum safe number. However, even before the train reached Carlisle a woman's voice could also clearly be heard – and most of the chatter seemed totally inconsequential to the safe running of the train. I'm horrified at what railway enthusiasts or the general public would think of this unsafe practice if they saw the DVD.

In all my 18 years as a railwayman, the message has always been 'safety, safety, safety', especially in the cab – where no one should be unnecessarily present and where the driver should not be distracted. Yet all I heard from Glasgow to Carlisle was inane babble.

As the train left Carlisle station a voice in the cab says something like, 'Give it some more horn for the 'box' – that is, sound the train horn unnecessarily contrary to the Rule Book. At that point I switched the DVD player off. Record breaking and charity fund raising or not, there was no need for these unsafe practices. The possible consequences on a 125 mph train do not bear thinking about.

Cameron Tyre Driver - Scotland

Old school inspectors are best

SHOULD drivers become Driver Team Leaders and managers after just a couple of years driving experience? From my experience, I don't think so.

Generally you can divide these people into the 'old

Unity in strength and compassion

On behalf of Nottingham Branch & Bro Paul Cann I wish to thank all the many branches & individuals who donated their money to the hardship fund in aid of the Paul Cann appeal.

So far we have raised over 5,500 pounds. This is a great tribute to all of us showing that unity is not only strength but also compassion. The amount raised was greater than the payout he received from Central Trains. Unfortunately, as Paul left E.W.S. in 2002, Central would only take into account his service since then.

Branch secretary bro Pete Coles and bro Jay Fowler went to meet Paul to present him with the cheque. He thanked everyone for the money that was raised.

Nicholas Jacobs
Nottingham Branch reporter

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CICA warning – don't come back

I HAVE recently been through the CICA (Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority) application process – and I'd like to warn other drivers unfortunate enough to have a fatality of the hoops that are required to be jumped through.

In May 2003 I had the misfortune to be driving a train involved in a fatality at Orpington in Kent. All the necessaries were done on the day of the incident and I completed a statement to Waterloo British Transport Police (BTP) the following day.

When I contacted my GP he advised me that he could offer little else than sleeping pills. He said that the counselling offered by my employer would be quicker than anything he could do. So I took a couple of days off work - but felt that the best place for me was back at work with my friends.

Over the next two weeks I spent time with my Traction Inspector, talking about whatever I felt able and going over the route of the fatality. By mid June I was able to consider driving again. In the meantime I had attended the counselling offered by the company for a six week period. All this was very hard - but I felt it was the best way for me, i.e. to 'get back on the bike'. I was wrong. Over the next three years I have discovered that dealing with such an experience in 'your own way' doesn't work.

CICA has a list of requirements before you can claim for such a traumatic experience, quite apart from the endless bureaucracy of the system. As mentioned earlier, my statement was made to Waterloo BTP. During the claim process, it closed. This meant all their records went to London Bridge BTP. They then put all their records onto computer, but sent paper copies to Camden BTP. You can imagine the problems: as CICA investigated the claim there was no trace of statements and other documents. I had all this stress on top of everything else.

Eventually, 3 years after the event, I receiver notification that my claim had been rejected. Why? The process required that I visited my GP twice, not once – despite the fact that he had told me that he could do nothing for me. It required me to have had at least 6 weeks off work – even though stewing at home is not for me and besides I had completed 6 weeks of counselling. It also required that I incurred a loss of income of at least £1,000. Of course I didn't, because we are salaried.

So colleagues, be warned. Don't come back to work early even if it would be beneficial to you - because the stress of the incident will only be compounded by CICA.

Denis McDonald Driver - Eurostar

school' and the 'new school'.

Many years ago we had Inspectors. The Inspectors were well respected by the Drivers and Firemen. They knew their Drivers and Firemen and if they had a good safety record they respected it.

Personally, in my case, I have been on the railway for 46 years, 11 years as a Fireman and 35 years as a Driver. I have never had a SPAD, a station overrun or a safety of the line incident. It's a good record that I am proud of.

Just five weeks before I retired a 'new school' team leader told me that my train driving licence would not be renewed because of a lack of confidence in me to do my job properly, something that would never have happened with the 'old school' Inspectors.

P. Begley Kings Cross Branch

Out with the OTMR

MY ongoing struggle to have the On Train Monitoring Recorder (OTMR) taken out of the driver competency evaluation is for much of the reasons you have stated in the November Journal. I feel that I am obligated to put on offer an alternative system for consideration:

Biennial rules to remain, only extended to one week to cover practice out of course events

Unobtrusive rides, there's no better way to see if a train is being driven in the correct manner, and full rule compliant

Questionnaires to see if publications signed for have been read

In place of safety days, secondments for a day with another company, or time at a signal box, control rooms, for overall railway appreciation and variety

The most important yard stick of competency is a drivers recent SPAD record

Giving drivers points for diagram misreads and missing an AWS is not allowing a driver the basic right of any human being, that of being allowed to make a mistake.

I also think that after five years of SPAD free driving a drivers record should be amended to take away any previous SPADs. New drivers are given much more time to learn our skills, it is no wonder the rate of SPADs of junior drivers.

I hope these ideas are at least thought-provoking.

Tom Dudley TGW - Penzance

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ANDY DERRETT (Ipswich 109 Branch Secretary) requires any ASLEF and NUR badges for private collection. Also any ASLEF 1982 strike badges for a display case. Please call 07734135330 or 01473 431813.

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The fascists will be defeated once again

The BNP is fighting for its own agenda and not for the people it claims to represent writes Jon Cruddas MP

I WAS pleased to see coverage of the Battle of Cable Street in the last edition of the Journal. The events of 4 October 1936 are not merely a reminder of past victories but a reminder of the dangers of fascism today.

Seventy years ago the people of East London rose up to prevent the British Union of Fascists (BUF) marching through their neighbourhood. Today, the threat comes from the British National Party (BNP) and while this generation of fascists might prefer suits to uniforms, canvassing sheets to anti-semitic placards, their politics are the same.

Today, as then, housing is the issue that is being exploited by the fascists. In the 1930s the BUF claimed that poor housing was the direct result of Jewish landlords while now the BNP is suggesting that the shortage of affordable housing is down to the presence of immigrants.

In both instances they were wrong.

Housing is an undeniable problem in communities like mine, in Dagenham, the new front line in the fight against the BNP. It is the outstanding public policy issue in my part of East London. Insecure work alongside changing patterns of household debt and rapid house price inflation have removed the prospects of home ownership for many, private rents rise remorselessly whilst access to low cost social housing is a dream.

With the rapid decline of manufacturing, most obvious with the decline of Fords from once employing almost 40,000 to the 5,000 at present, and massive movement of people in recent years, the pressures on people at the bottom are immense.

Against this backdrop, the BNP are trying to move in and create division. Of course the real reason for a shortage of housing is the 'right to buy scheme', which has taken half of the council's housing stock out of public hands, and the inability to build new affordable homes.

Unfortuntately, this Labour Government remains locked into a view of the country and the model by which it must govern. They take the view that a political strategy driven by fairness and tolerance offers diminishing returns; that a liberal approach to issues like crime and migration spells political death and that the iron law of modern politics dictates that any talk of higher taxes to invest in better infrastructure and public services will inevitably lead to political wipeout.

In the wretched currency of modern politics we have to triangulate at the expense of the most vulnerable, so as to "prove" our political bona fides to the press – those who have real political power in the current system. The science of modern politics is to find ever more precise ways of targeting these tough messages at swing voters in key seats refracted through friends in the media. People outside of these tight confines – in marginalised areas of Dagenham, or the Midlands or the North East – do not figure.

While the Battle of Cable Street most graphically symbolises the defeat of Mosley, there was another front on which the war was wageing. This, in the long term, had a far more significant influence in winning local people away from fascism.

Encouraged by the events of Cable Street, some people realised that the fascists had to be defeated within the local community, and that meant addressing the issues like housing. The result was the Stepney Tenants Defence League (STDL).

The STDL organised rent strikes aimed at bringing recalcitrant slum landlords to the negotiating table winning vital concessions and rent reductions for beleaguered tenants in the process. They even assisted fascist tenants too, saving them from eviction. The BUF had done nothing for them. As a result BUF membership cards were torn up in disgust.

By helping local people overcome the problems they faced in their daily lives and to help them to understand that these were not caused by "Jews" or "alien immigrants" the STDL raised people's political consciousness, empowered them to take responsibility for their own destinies; proving that unity rather than division was the only way through which the community could overcome the obstacles of social deprivation.

This form of community organisation remains a model for us to use today. And I am optimistic. In the communities where the BNP is a threat a new politics is being forged; anti-fascists and church groups, local union branches, voluntary and political groups are coming together in new creative ways to confront the far right.

Whilst all the political parties seek the vote of a specific minority of swing voters in a highly select part of the country, a new anti-fascist mobilisation is being co-ordinated to fight the fascist on a different political and geographical landscape.

The Battle of Cable Street helped to set in motion this more sophisticated and ultimately more successful brand of anti-fascist politics. The lessons are there to be relearned.

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FREE LEGAL ADVICE ASLEF also provides first class free legal advice - both for members and for their dependents. In the first six months of this year we have secured £1,442,360 in compensation claims! Call the helpline on 0808 100 8009

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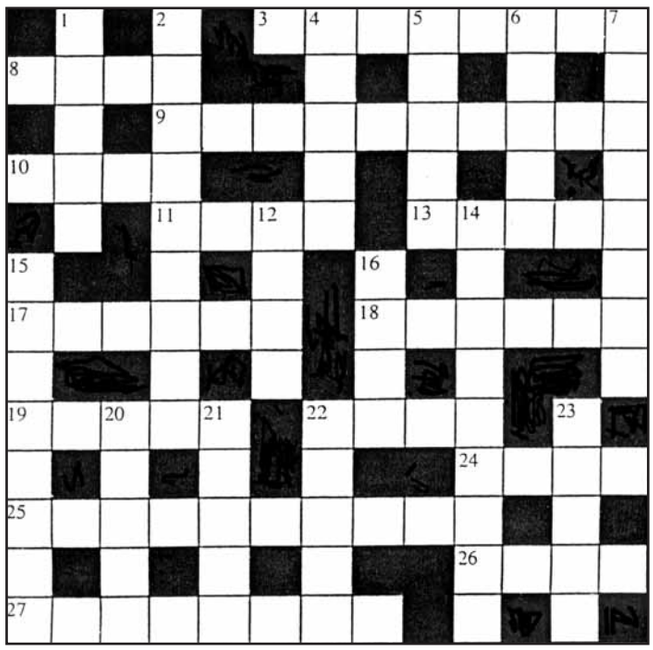
ASLEF *more than just a union*

THOMPSONS SOLICITORS

Prize Crossword No. 9

set by TLC



Solution to Crossword No 8 which appeared in the December edition of the ASLEF Journal. Congratulations to **Tony Larham** from **March Cambs**

ACROSS 1 The Broads 8 The Wizard of Oz 11 Noon 12 Sammy 13 Flat 16 Peanuts 17 Nanette 18 Charred 20 Problem 21 Oath 22 Ankle 23 Grin 26 Judas Iscariot 27 Christmas **DOWN** 2 Hawk 3 Bazaars 4 Oarsman 5 Door 6 Throw a tantrum 7 Too Little Room 9 Inspector 10 Streaming 14 Guard 15 Onion 19 Dandini 20 Polecat 24 Each 25 Aria

Thanks for all your responses to the eighth ASLEF crossword in the December edition. If you complete this month's crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 9 Arkwright Road, London NW3 6AB by the end of the month.

ACROSS

3 (and 14 Down) Large quadruped and a Fortress seen on the Bakerloo Line! (8)
8 An 'initial' warning for a misbehaving teen (4)
9 Underground station in Central London (10)
10 Look before you do this! (4)
11 Jug (4)
13 Gunfire (5)
17 Closed vessel for heating water (6)
18 Small person (6)
19 Reproach (5)
22 She was a friend of the King of Siam (4)
24 Ingredient of dumplings (4)
25 Not working during the day (5,5)
26 Lion's den (4)
27 People in authority at clubs, race-courses, etc (8)

DOWN

1 Nothing FALSE about this rail union! (5)
2 Obligated (9)
4 Type of cake (5)
5 Newspaper industry or journalism in general (5)
6 Coral reef (5)
7 Regions of England noted for flat caps, black pudding and rugby league! (3,5)
12 Organs of hearing (4)
14 (See 3 across) (3,6)
15 Runs away from captivity (8)
16 Word said at the end of a prayer (4)
20 Type of large fireplace (5)
21 Additional (5)
22 Greenfly (5)
23 Overhaul the vehicle (5)

The winner of this month's crossword will receive Marks & Spencer vouchers to the value of £25

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